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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SCHAFER (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 71: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 71: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (A/SPC/46/L.11, A/46/20, A/46/389)

1. Mr. FREUDENSCHUSS (Austria), speaking on behalf of the Working Group on International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, introduced draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11 on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. The Working Group had agreed on the text and, as a result of consultations, the only amendment pending had been included as paragraph 14 of the draft resolution. He recommended that the Special Political Committee should adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

2. Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the expansion of space activities and the increasing number of States wishing to become involved in them together with the need to maintain outer space for peaceful purposes, were all factors showing the relevance of enhancing the role of the United Nations in international cooperation in space. Current world developments had made States more interested in further developing the institutional basis of international space cooperation, although of course various States and groups of States had their own priorities. His Government took a constructive approach towards solutions and ideas which would promote international space cooperation, enable all interested States to become involved in space activities and develop multilateral and bilateral cooperation mechanisms. It considered that forthcoming discussions in the Legal Subcommittee would lead to a better understanding of the tasks ahead and find new legal ways of resolving them.

3. His delegation shared the opinions expressed by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and its subcommittees on the need to develop transparency- and confidence-building measures, and believed that the Committee's involvement in that would complement both the work of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament and regional disarmament efforts. The Committee could for example provide expert findings and information on legal aspects, and proposals on space safety guidelines, including technical ones.

4. His delegation noted with satisfaction recent work by the Legal and Scientific and Technical Subcommittees on draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

5. New subjects which could be addressed by the Subcommittees included legal aspects of manned space flights, particularly in view of the draft convention on the matter submitted by experts from the Soviet Union, the United States and Germany.

6. Another major issue was the dangerous proliferation of space debris. High priority should be accorded to that problem, and it should, subject to consensus, be added to the agenda of the Scientific and Technical

(Mr. Ordzhonikidze, Soviet Union)

Subcommittee. In the long run, new international legal standards and principles to prevent or minimize pollution of outer space might be envisaged.

7. COPUOS could also take up certain issues related to the utilization of fixed-altitude vehicles, including the legal status and legal regime of airborne and space flights and questions of liability. A general analysis of the above issues could improve understanding of matters relating to the delimitation of air and outer space and determine the future need for international legal standards and principles governing the operation of outer space systems at certain altitudes, in particular as applied to flights in foreign airspace, since a number of nations were intensively developing air/space systems for multiple purposes. The variety of functional characteristics of air/space systems and the technologies used raised interesting problems in the area of international law, for example whether it would be possible to develop a single unified regime governing the flights of such objects or whether the regulations would vary depending on the engineering, technical and functional specifications of the air/space systems involved.

8. The Soviet Union had considerable experience in staffed space flights. The space station Mir had been in orbit for six years and was an example of international cooperation in space since it had welcomed aboard crew members from all over the world. Further examples of successful international cooperation were the COSPAS-SARSAT orbital system, and cooperation projects dealing with environmental problems.

9. The Soviet Union had established a national commission to prepare for International Space Year, and had already contributed by hosting the fourth Space Agency Forum to prepare for 1992.

10. As a result of the changes going on in the Soviet Union, it seemed likely that inter-republican structures would be set up in the space sector and that the sovereign republics would maintain an interest in continued space activities.

11. Mr. JIN Yongjian (China) said that recent international cooperation in the field of space had increasingly benefited the economic development and social progress of the countries concerned. COPUOS had made a valuable contribution in that context through its work, as had the Outer Space Affairs Division of the United Nations, through the Programme on Space Applications, by sponsoring various workshops, seminars and symposia.

12. China attached great importance to developing space technology and to applying it to various industries, to the educational system through communications satellites, and to surveying areas throughout the country with remote-sensing satellites.

(Mr. Jin Yongjian, China)

13. In that connection it was worth mentioning the application of space technology in combating natural disasters. The images and data promptly acquired through remote-sensing had enabled the scale of the devastating floods in China the previous summer to be assessed and had provided a basis for decision-making on relief.

14. His delegation welcomed the reports of COPUOS and its two subcommittees, and was particularly pleased to note that informal consultations on the question of nuclear power sources had made progress. The tenth revised text of the draft set of principles on the issue, submitted by Canada and Germany, would serve as a good basis for further discussion.

15. His Government considered that activities carried out in the framework of International Space Year would greatly contribute to the development of space science and technology, particularly international cooperation in space activities. China had already held a series of exhibitions, seminars and workshops in connection with the Year.

16. Mr. MIHOV (Bulgaria) stressed the need for wide-ranging international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space. The rapid expansion in space sciences meant that the results of space exploration had a direct bearing on economic and everyday activities and the number of countries involved had continually increased. Despite its limited resources, his own country was playing its part in international, regional and bilateral space cooperation. Bulgarian-made equipment had already performed well in international space projects, and his country was now working on its own programmes for remote sensing, space biology and medicine, satellite telecommunications and meteorology.

17. He welcomed the Committee's report, which reflected the progress made during its thirty-fourth session on a number of disputed issues, particularly on the elaboration of principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. In that respect, the approval by consensus of principles 8 and 9, concerning responsibility and liability and compensation respectively, represented a positive breakthrough. He hoped that the full set of principles could be adopted in the near future and that the differences remaining in the interpretation of the term "launching State" (principle 1A) and in respect of prior notification and safety assessment (principle 4) could be ironed out. He also considered that the applicability of the principles and their effective implementation would depend on principle 3 being fully harmonized with the most recent relevant international provisions.

18. The issues of space debris and satellite remote sensing for monitoring the Earth's environment should be given priority in international space cooperation and in the work of COPUOS. In that connection, he welcomed the decision taken at the thirty-fourth session to support the proposal that the next subject to be discussed at the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee's session in 1992 should be space technology and the protection of the

(Mr. Mihov, Bulgaria)

environment. With regard to the definition or delimitation of outer space and the geostationary orbit, his delegation believed that the concrete proposals made during the sessions of the Legal Subcommittee and COPUOS offered a stable basis for further discussion.

19. Mr. FUJITA (Brazil) said that, against the background of recent momentous events on the international stage and the new atmosphere of cooperation, the twin imperatives of preserving outer space for peaceful purposes and promoting solidarity and cooperation in its exploration and use had assumed even greater importance. International cooperation must serve the interests of all States, with particular reference to the needs of the developing countries, and, in that regard, the United Nations and COPUOS had an important role to play.

20. COPUOS should adopt a new and dynamic approach to its work, reflecting the new international climate and the revitalization of the United Nations, and should seek to deal with long-standing issues such as the elaboration of draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. Being itself vulnerable to space accidents, by virtue of its geographical location and large territory and population, his own country attached great importance to an early and successful conclusion of work on that question. Despite its reservations, his delegation had gone along with the consensus on principles 8 and 9 in a spirit of flexibility and cooperation, but difficulties remained with regard to the proposed merger of principles 2 and 4, a matter which required careful consideration.

21. With regard to new items, he welcomed the opening of discussions on the legal aspects of the principle that the exploration and utilization of outer space should benefit all States, taking into particular account the needs of the developing countries, and pointed out that, together with Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Uruguay and Venezuela, his delegation had submitted to the Legal Subcommittee at its last session a working paper on principles regarding international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes, as part of a multilateral effort to determine universally acceptable guidelines for such cooperation. The main parameters envisaged were transparency, predictability, equity, effectiveness and mutual benefits in international cooperation in outer space, with the aim of disseminating space benefits and technology and fostering indigenous space capabilities. The delegations concerned hoped that the document would serve as a starting point for a joint reflection by the space powers and developing countries aimed at building a partnership for a new agenda in multilateral cooperation to ensure that the benefits of the peaceful uses of outer space were shared fairly among all nations.

22. Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka) welcomed the Committee's report as an opportunity to learn about the latest developments in space technology programmes and reviewed the history of the exploration and peaceful use of outer space, with particular reference to the United Nations achievements in the field. The coming year would be one of great significance because of the forthcoming

(Mr. Kalpage, Sri Lanka)

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and also of the fact that the General Assembly had proclaimed it International Space Year. There would be great emphasis on the application of space technology to the field of the environment, and bilateral, regional and wider international cooperation in that sector could help all countries, especially the developing ones.

23. The work of the Indian Ocean Maritime Affairs Cooperation (IOMAC) provided a framework for economic, scientific and technical cooperation involving African, Asian and other countries as well as United Nations bodies, and useful workshops and meeting had been held or were planned as part of its programme concerning regional cooperation in the field of remote sensing. The success of such efforts depended on the availability of funds from countries of the region as well as from multilateral and other funding agencies.

24. His country had agreed to host the planned regional centre for space science and technology education for the ESCAP region, which was intended to assist in developing the necessary human resources in remote sensing and related technologies to support the environmental management, resource assessment and mapping needs of participating countries in Asia and the Pacific, while also strengthening institutions of higher education and providing national/regional remote-sensing user assistance and training centres in the region. It had also offered to provide the land, buildings and facilities needed for a campus of the International Space University, a matter to be decided on at the World Space Congress in Washington, D.C. in 1992.

25. The main focus of International Space Year would be the use of space technology for the study and monitoring of the environment, and he hoped that the information derived from the planned programmes and activities could be disseminated as widely as possible in the developing countries. It would be appropriate if the work of the Legal Subcommittee and the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space could be completed in 1992 and the principles adopted by the General Assembly at the conclusion of International Space Year.

26. His delegation endorsed the Committee's report and hoped that, in the more promising environment offered by the end of the cold war, the work of the United Nations could help ensure that outer space would be used for the benefit of all.

27. Mr. HODGKINS (United States of America) said that the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee during 1991 had reinforced the view of his delegation that COPUOS had been on the right track in recent years in seeking to strengthen the scientific and technical underpinnings of its work. The discussions in the Committee must however be reoriented away from extraneous issues for which it had no mandate, such as disarmament. The mandate of COPUOS was that of the only standing Committee of the General Assembly concerned exclusively with international cooperation in the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. In that connection his delegation

(Mr. Hodgkins, United States)

rejected the view expressed by the representative of Mexico that the United States was engaged in activities that threatened the peaceful uses of outer space. The United States conducted its space activities in strict compliance with its treaty obligations, the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

28. Some progress had been made in improving the methods and forms of the work of COPUOS and its subcommittees, particularly in addressing the perennial problem of the organization of work of the Legal Subcommittee. He welcomed the specific measures taken to improve the efficiency of that body, and was pleased to note that discussions would continue regarding the venue of subsequent meetings of the Subcommittee and that the Secretariat intended to minimize additional non-conference servicing costs associated with supporting the next session of the Subcommittee in Geneva. The view of his delegation continued however to be that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had been correct in recommending that the Legal Subcommittee should cease its practice of holding alternate sessions in Geneva.

29. He reiterated the interest of his Government in bringing the negotiation of the full set of principles regarding the safe use of nuclear power sources in space to a conclusion which would ensure the highest degree of safety in regard to space nuclear power consistent with the need for clarity and unimpeachable technical content in areas related to design criteria for safe use. In that connection, his delegation had urged certain changes to draft principle 3 which would serve to enhance its technical strength. The concerns which his delegation had identified in that connection were sufficiently important to require modifications to the draft text before it was submitted to the General Assembly. It was important that the final text should enjoy a high degree of scientific credibility and the broadest possible support internationally.

30. The issue of space debris was of concern to all nations interested in the exploration and use of outer space and, his delegation urged Member States to pay more attention to the problems of collisions with space debris as well as other aspects of the issue. United States authorities were devoting substantial resources to research in that area and were disseminating the results of that work widely. The issue of space debris could be an appropriate subject for future detailed discussion by COPUOS.

31. The celebration of the International Space Year in 1992 would represent a unique opportunity to publicize several significant international space research and education programmes and to communicate the importance of space science and technology to the general public. One of the main international events would be the World Space Congress, to be held in Washington, D.C. in August 1992.

(Mr. Hodgkins, United States)

32. The United States had been working closely with the Secretariat to implement a three-part programme as part of the United Nations role in the international space year and believed that the substantive training and educational opportunities provided through the United Nations Programme on Space Applications formed a solid foundation for the involvement of the United Nations in activities of the Year.

33. Mr. MGBOKWERE (Nigeria) said that the renewed hope for the creation of a new world order demanded a firm commitment by the international community to preserve outer space for peaceful exploration and to renounce the militarization of space. Greater efforts should be made to enable all nations to share the benefits and to ensure that outer space activities did not pollute the global environment.

34. The considerable developments in space technology since the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies had been adopted in 1967 emphasized the need for additional international instruments to update existing legislation on the subject. The issue of the definition and delimitation of outer space therefore merited the urgent attention of the international community.

35. Another key area which required urgent attention concerned the need for access by many developing States to space activities. The major space Powers and technologically advanced nations should significantly increase their bilateral and multilateral financing for relevant training and technical assistance programmes, and should engage in joint ventures with the developing countries in activities including training, shared payloads, access to launch capabilities at reasonable cost and participation in flight operations. International machinery was required to ensure that the mainstream of the world community benefited from spin-off benefits. Document A/AC.105/486 provided a useful insight into current shortcomings in that respect. COPUOS should accordingly focus on establishing a linkage between space exploration and utilization and the welfare of mankind. In that connection his delegation proposed that spin-off applications should be disseminated quickly to other countries through trade, education, technical assistance or other forms of technological transfer; that international efforts to enable more countries to benefit from such applications should focus on improving the exchange of information relating to actual or potential spin-off technologies, applications and benefits; and that COPUOS could play a useful role in enhancing spin-off benefits to other nations. It therefore called for regular seminars on spin-off benefits for the developing countries as part of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications, and in that connection warmly welcomed the seminar held in Bangalore, India in 1991. His delegation also shared the view that remote-sensing data and analysed information should be made available to all countries at reasonable cost and in a timely manner.

(Mr. Mgbokwere, Nigeria)

36. As part of the contribution of COPUOS to the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, his delegation proposed that the issue of space debris should be considered under a separate agenda item by a working group of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at its next meeting and that the Secretariat of the Outer Space Affairs Division should be mandated to carry out a detailed study on all the aspects of the question of space debris during 1992 and to submit its report to COPUOS at its thirty-fifth session in June 1992.

37. The remaining principles on the use of nuclear power sources were likely to be finalized during the twenty-ninth session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, and no attempt to reopen already agreed principles should be allowed until all aspects of outstanding principles had been initially concluded. It was to be hoped that the positive reception by the Legal Subcommittee of the working paper of the Group of 77 on the geostationary orbit would lead to progress on that issue as well in 1992.

38. To enable the United Nations to cope with its increasing responsibilities in promoting the peaceful uses of outer space, Nigeria would like to see a broadening of the financial contributions to outer space programmes by governmental and non-governmental organizations, foundations and other bodies.

39. Mr. JOBIN (Canada) welcomed the adoption by COPUOS of two more draft principles on the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space, namely, draft principle 8 (responsibility) and draft principle 9 (liability and compensation). His delegation was confident that such a significant breakthrough could lead to the adoption of the last three draft principles at the next session of the Legal Subcommittee. Thereafter the General Assembly could adopt the whole set of principles as a significant United Nations contribution to the International Space Year.

40. His Government was proud to have hosted the recent congress of the International Astronautical Federation in Montreal attended by space experts from around the world. Canada was committed to helping developing countries gain access to the benefits of space activities and in that regard had provided support through bilateral activities, in particular those of the Canadian International Development Agency; it had also assisted the United Nations Programme on Space Applications by providing experts for seminars organized for developing countries. Within the framework of the same programme, Canada had sponsored a workshop on space technologies for development.

41. Concerning the legal aspects related to the application of the principle that the exploration and utilization of outer space should be carried out for the benefit of all States, Canada welcomed the introduction of draft principles covering the needs of developing countries at the last session of the Legal Subcommittee.

(Mr. Jobin, Canada)

42. Major developments in the Canadian space programme during the past year had included a publication outlining Canada's space activities which showed how Canada's space programme had developed through international cooperation. The single largest activity had been the development, in partnership with the United States of America, Japan and the European Space Agency (ESA), of the mobile servicing system, to be used for the assembly and maintenance of the international space station. Work had been intensified on the RADARSAT remote sensing satellite, planned to be launched in 1994 by the United States. Several space science cooperative activities were under way with the Soviet Union. During the past year Canada had also finalized cooperative arrangements with the ESA on five technology development programmes dealing with advanced space communications, earth observation and space transportation.

43. His delegation had noted with satisfaction the growing attention being devoted to the relationship between space and environment, with particular reference to the problem of space debris. The relationship was reflected in the use of space technologies such as remote sensing to gather information useful for research on environmental problems on earth and for managing natural resources as well as in the protection of the environment of both the Earth and space from potentially hazardous activities.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.